

SPECIAL EVENTS

*The Faculty of Music,
University of Toronto*

*Concert Hall,
Edward Johnson Building*

LaSalle Quartet

Walter Levin - Violin

Henry Meyer - Violin

Peter Kamnitzer - Viola

Jack Kirstein - Cello

Thursday, January 11th, 1968

8:30 p.m.

Program

QUARTET IN F MAJOR, K. 590 - - - - - Mozart

Allegro moderato

Andante

Menuetto: Allegretto

Allegro

The three last Mozart quartets, known as the "Prussian," were a direct outcome of the composer's visit to the Prussian court at Berlin early in 1789. The Prussian monarch, Friedrich Wilhelm II, was an enthusiastic amateur cellist. His chief resident musician was Jean-Pierre Duport, one of two brothers who were both prominent cello-virtuosi of the day. Mozart ridiculed Duport's musicianship, but apparently received some pointers on cello technique from his colleague. Returning to Vienna, he composed this series of quartets, intending to dedicate them to the King. This accounts for the prominence given to the cello part here and there in the quartets, and for the prevailing brilliance and wit of these works, in contrast to the more "learned" qualities of the previously-written set of six which were dedicated to Josef Haydn.

This, the last of the "Prussian" trilogy, is somewhat larger and more serious in scope than the other two. The splendid opening idea, three bars long, has a sharp rhythmic and dynamic profile, and is announced in octaves. It dominates the whole first movement. A secondary theme, as in the other quartets of the series, is set out in a concerted dialogue between cello and first violin. The Adagio speaks from the heart; many commentators have found in it an expression of farewell. The "consoling" rhythmic contours of the opening theme are present practically throughout — as a background for melodic tracery, or overlapping in the momentary tension of double canon. The main theme of the Minuet seems to grow from a whimsical turning round one note. The improvisational spirit is also seen in the irregular construction (phrases of seven bars' length) and in the freedom with which the motives are handled at the expected point of reprise. The Finale presents its chief musical idea in sentences which answer between violin and viola. The continuation has teasing stops and starts, in the Haydn manner, very much exploited in later parts of the movement. Another amusing touch is provided by the violently declaiming gestures of the first violin part, in the midst of a very loud busy texture at one point. Mozart ends his quartet-writing career on a note of high comedy.

STRING QUARTET (1905) - - - - - Anton Webern

Among the works by Webern left unpublished at his death, several have recently been brought to light. In 1962 Hans Molderhauer, head of a Webern archive collection in Spokane, Wash., author of two studies of the composer, and organizer of a remarkable Webern Festival, sponsored performances and publication of two hitherto unknown works for string quartet — a *Langsamer Satz* and the present one-movement *Quartet*. Both were composed in the year 1905 when Webern was a student of Arnold Schoenberg's in Vienna. They are contemporary with Schoenberg's own *First Quartet*, and, not surprisingly, show at many points resemblances to its late-romantic expression and tightness of motivic organization.

The main musical materials of the Quartet — a trenchant three-note motive, strikingly similar to those found in late Webern, though not so abstractly handled; a passage of slithering chromatic counterpoint; and a broadly romantic songlike theme — are exposed and developed in a vigorous and full-blown style, replete with the sort of vitality the Schoenbergian motivic cross-references always seem to give to musical textures. "Minutiae of expression," as one authority calls them, are frequent in the score: in almost every bar one finds markings like "with the most elaborate expression," "hardly audible," "very much held back," "very relaxed," "with the most intimate and tender

feeling," and so on. These are moreover translated into practical sound with an exaggerated changeability of timbre approaching Webern's slightly later "expressionistic" manner: muted, *pizzicato*, and octave-doubled tones alternate with normal bowed ones. However Webern does not yet lean towards either the harmonics or the *ponticello* effects of his subsequent quartet scores, perhaps because he was at this stage more absorbed in counterpoint and expressive lines in the abstract sense than in string-playing techniques; for example, at one point in the Quartet he calls for a completely unplayable low two-note chord in the second violin.

Reviewing both the *Langsamer Satz* and this work in *Notes*, Wallace C. McKenzie remarks that though they may disappoint devotees of the mature Webern, they are "excellent late Romantic works in their own right," and provide "evidence that the twenty-two-year-old pupil of Schoenberg was a composer of meaningful musical ideas and rapidly developing craft."

A sketch described by Moldenhauer bears the description in the composer's hand: "Sketch for a string quartet after the triptych: Becoming, Being, Passing away." This is a clue which places the work in the tradition of the Beethoven quartets, especially the late ones, where the music symbolizes inner moral and ethical struggles. Inside the title-page of his manuscript, Webern inscribed a "motto" from the writings of the German shoemaker-mystic Jakob Böhme (1575-1624): "The sense of Triumph that prevailed within my Spirit I cannot write nor tell; it can with naught be compared, save only where in the midst of Death, Life is born, like unto the Resurrection of the Dead. In this Light did my Mind forthwith penetrate all Things; and in all living Creatures, even in Weeds and Grass, did perceive God, who He may be and how He may be and what His Will is."

PRELUDE FOR STRING QUARTET - - - - - Toshiro Mayuzumi

Mayuzumi's *Prelude*, composed in 1964, has received performances by a number of leading quartets. One Paris critic found in it "a solitary, motionless universe in black and white, peopled by magic birds," while another said listening to it was "a rather explosive mélange of surprise, irritation, and pleasure." Writing in *The Musical Quarterly*, John S. Weissmann commented on the piece in these words: "Mayuzumi managed to instil completely new effects into his *Prelude for String Quartet* by an entirely personal approach to such time-honored devices as *pizzicato* and *glissando*. Oriental sources may have been responsible for his melodic or motivic inspiration. . . . The music consists of a remarkably delicate texture reminding one at times of certain passages in Bartók . . . and even in Debussy. But . . . Mayuzumi's Quartet is modelled on strange intervals and melodic turns; nor do his rhythmic schemes have anything like the resolute directness that characterizes Bartók, for instance. On the showing of this music Mayuzumi's is a totally new voice, exciting yet discreet, immensely well formulated yet refreshingly unpredictable, and strikingly confident in its methods."

The events of the *Prelude* fall into a succession approximately as follows: 1) a free, sustained-tone section against which a *pizzicato* element gradually intrudes; 2) what amounts to a four-voiced "double fugue," begun in the two violins, whose increasingly fantastic ornamentation coalesces at length in a series of group dissonances with rising *glissandi*; 3) an extraordinary passage played *pizzicato* on two open strings of each instrument, during which each performer alters the tuning of one of the two strings being used; 4) a quiet, static close. The *Prelude* takes a flexible view of musical time, since the many pauses, silent or sounded, are measured by the performers rather than notated exactly in the score. The composer suggests that "the performers should be placed on the stage as far away from one another as possible, so that each sound can be heard by the listener separately" — a feature which may derive from the String Quartet No. 2 of Elliott Carter. He also directs that "every

note should be played without *vibrato*, unless otherwise notated" — which brings to mind the totally *vibrato*-less Quartet of John Cage. About half the *pizzicato* notes are to be "snapped" in the Bartók manner. (All this is of course not to imply that the *Prelude* is at all reminiscent of Carter, Cage, or Bartók in its actual content.)

Toshiro Mayuzumi, born in 1929, is one of the best-known and most prolific of the Japanese avant-gardists. His particular concentration has been on allying Western-music processes and techniques with the qualities of oriental classical music. Works in which this synthesis appears are the *Nirvana-Symphony* (1959), the ballet *Bugaku* (1963, choreography by Balanchine), and the opera *Minoko* (1964). Certain other works explore particular areas of modern musical thought — *musique concrète* in *Aoi-No-Ue* (1959) and *Campanology* (1961), and an engaging neo-Dadaism in the wildly gestural but almost soundless *Metamusic* (1961) for conductor, piano, violin, and saxophone.

GROSSE FUGE, OP. 133 - - - - - Beethoven

"Today a new and more dramatic quality must be brought into fugue writing," Beethoven told his disciple Ferdinand Ries. On the evidence of the many fugato passages and full-dress fugues scattered through the works of his last years, what he meant was that some means of rapport should be achieved between the active, driving processes of the classical sonata style and the essentially passive, static processes of fugue. His two mightiest solutions to this musical problem are the finale of the Op. 106 Piano Sonata (the *Hammerklavier*) and the present work, which began life as the finale of the B flat Quartet, Op. 130, later to be extracted from it for reasons of its unwieldy length.

The *Grosse Fuge* is at the same time a double fugue on an enormous scale and a dramatic vehicle bearing the dual characteristics of a greatly-expanded sonata-allegro and a continuous and greatly compressed four-movement sonata. It begins with a motto-like introduction, bearing clear motivic links to a theme found in various forms in all three of its companion-works of the mid-1820s, the Quartets Op. 130, 131, and 132. Then comes a loud, fast, dense, and rhythmically insistent double fugue. Contrast arrives, in a remote tonality, in the form of a new double-fugue combination in slower and smoother vein. This is soon succeeded by a bouncing scherzo section, carrying us headlong into a brilliant development where many traditional fugal devices (inversion, augmentation, etc.) are added to Beethoven's characteristic developmental vocabulary. The slower section is restated at a more exultant dynamic level than before, and the scherzo also reappears briefly. Throughout, the fugal subjects take on many disguises, so that the work is from another angle a study in variation techniques. Finally we have a long, haranguing Beethovenian peroration with further developmental ideas and an expressive sense, similar to that of so many earlier finales or coda-sections in Beethoven, of the emergence from sweat and struggle into an air of clarity, human optimism, and affirmation.

In this work, this "*Grand Fugue, tantôt libre, tantôt recherché*" as the composer called it, Beethoven achieved a unique synthesis of the personal philosophy his music so often clearly symbolizes and the devices of fugue that seemed to him, from his own previous fugal finales and those of Mozart and Haydn before him, to be still viable. The work is indeed unique among his compositions, unmistakably his yet strangely difficult of approach in the context of his other works — a "perfect miracle," and an "absolutely contemporary piece of music that will be contemporary forever," in its rhythmic life alone "more subtle than any music composed in my century," as Igor Stravinsky remarks in a recent appreciation of it.